1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[ARCHERS]

POLITICAL LIFE

Authority

622 T14

None of the foregoing material is much concerned with leadership, and, indeed, it has been scarcely necessary to mention it. Some of the early sources, such as Casati (1891), Burrows (1898), Geil (1905), and Lang (1919) assert the existence of hereditary chieftainship; others (Johnston, 1902, 1904; Christy, 1924) deny this just as emphatically. Stuhlmann (1894), referring to bands of Mbuti living near the Manyema, states that the leader of each band is the ablest hunter and that he controls the wanderings of his band. Whether or not he has any other jurisdiction is not known.

622 [T77]

Schebesta flatly denies the existence of hereditary chieftainship anywhere among the Mbuti, except among those most acculturated. He also denies the existence of charismatic

[1] Antelope cries are imitated in this way.

[P 184-D]

[ARCHERS]

[P.186-A]

622 leadership among the Mbuti except very rarely. He himself discusses the lineage elders ("*Sippenältesten*," Schebesta, 1948, 332, 559) and states that lineage authority lies with these elders alone. Under villager influence these elders may assume the characteristics of a chief (cf. the "Sultani" of the Pygmies, mentioned by Geil, 1905). Encouraged in this by the villagers, who see a way of extending their authority, the lineage elders may appear to become headmen or chieftains of Mbuti bands, representing the band to the village chief.

622 613 888 [769] As mentioned above, the authority of the elder derives from his age, by virtue of which he represents the lineage ancestors. Any offense against the elder is an offense against the lineage. He takes precedence in all matters: the best part of the game is his, whether or not he took part in the hunt; he presides at various ritual offerings; he is responsible for settling disputes with other bands or with villagers; he leads at the head of the dance. Succession by age is strictly observed. This much Schebesta (1952, 221–223) reports, but without citing examples in sufficient detail to enable us to make a valid comparison between different groups or bands.

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[ARCHERS]

• 622 The elder settles numerous disputes, both
624 within and without his hunting band. Such dis-
613 putes mainly concern marital disagreements, Schebesta says. The elders often settle controversies by delivering speeches during the evening, leading frequently to noisy debates between the elders of different bands or lineages.
[171] Outside the lineage context, the elder is not in any way different from the others; there are none of the trappings of villager chieftainship. He delivers his decisions without hesitancy and is obeyed in the same way within his lineage. His power is limited, however, by custom and tradition as well as by context. He may neither ignore nor alter traditional practices.[1]

Relationship Between Bands

628 It has already been observed that any formal
613 relationship between bands is regulated by the lineage elders, according to Schebesta.

[114] [1] Once again Schebesta's account is confused, and confusing, because of his failure to define clearly the kinship constitution of the hunting band. As the bands are, in effect, usually cognatic, and as descent is of little significance, his assumption that the band is a patrilineage and that authority is based on lineage respect naturally led him into difficulty.

[P. 185-B]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Zaire FO1

[ARCHERS]

Costermans further agrees with Junker (1889–1891, vol. 3, 92) that many of the northern archers have recently themselves taken to a system of chieftainship. They lead their nomadic existence under the jurisdiction of a chief and in every way preserve their freedom under this jurisdiction. If there is any disagreement, however, they leave and place themselves under a neighboring chief. But not nearly enough information is given for any understanding of the structure of this "system."

Schebesta seems to stand between the two extremes with regard to the archers whom he studied. He stresses the economic dependency of the Mbuti on the villagers, and also, as does Putnam (1948), the personal aspect of the relationship. He does not agree with Costermans that the archers change their allegiance at the slightest provocation. He regards the *nkumbi*, with its creation of *karé* relationships between individual Mbuti and villagers, as a major factor in maintaining villager authority over the archers and rendering the latter dependent on their Lese neighbors.

[P. 185-D]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

173 [p.228-A]
534 animal and since then no woman has been al-
825 lowed to see it.
562 Local villagers, who claim also to have the
171 *molimo*, are critical of the occasional joking at-
177 titude of the Mbuti and say that they, the vil-
534 lagers, call it out only when someone important has died.

POLITICAL LIFE

Authority

• 622 Putnam goes further than Schebesta with re-
888 gard to the existence or non-existence of chief-
tainship among the Mbuti. Primarily of the net
[623] hunters he writes, "... there are no chiefs, councils, or any other formal governing bodies in a pygmy camp" (Putnam, 1948, 334). There is respect, he says, for age and experience (*not* for "elders"); the opinions of the old and the wise are generally heeded. Any individual who shows disrespect for an old man, or who refuses to comply with any reasonable request, is abused by the others. Old men who are eccentrics are ignored.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

as a unit of Mbuti hunters sharing and recognizing a common hunting territory.[2] No matter what group the band falls under, the definition holds. The territory is clearly defined by natural boundaries, though the law of trespass depends somewhat on the location of the home band within its territory at the moment of trespass. The boundaries, though fixed, are under certain circumstances capable of penetration without causing offense.

The composition of the band is fluid, to say the least, and does not follow any clear unilineal or cognatic descent system. Throughout the forest, the bands are in a constant state of fragmentation as well as in a constant process of fission and fusion. Members of any band are quite likely at any moment to leave and join another band, temporarily or permanently, for any one of a number of reasons. In-law visiting is common, and permanent attachments to the band are sometimes accomplished this way. But at the same time, with each successive, monthly change of site, the hunting camp also shows another stage in the over-all process of fission and fusion along recognizable lines of structural cleavage. At certain times of the year, different for net-hunters and archers, the band splits up into a number of smaller sub-bands, all still hunting within the same over-all territory, but as independent units.

It has generally been stated, sometimes citing the apparent lack of an Mbuti language as an example, that the Mbuti are a people without a culture of their own, adopting the culture of their villager neighbors just as they adopt their language. A superficial look at a hunting society, with its lack of easily recognizable social institutions, might seem to confirm that opinion. There is no chieftainship, no council of elders, but sometimes an individual who assumes the villager title of *sultani* or *capita*. There is no legal system supported by effective or formal supernatural sanctions. There is an evident lack of any kinship system except an apparently slavish imitation of the villager clan and lineage system, whereby certain individuals related through the principle of patrilineal descent recognize a common ancestor and symbolize their unity by the respect of a common totem. Any attempt to integrate this system with other institutions, indigenous or adopted,

[2] Throughout, except where otherwise specified, I use the term "band" in this sense of a unit that is primarily territorial. It is essentially composed of peoples bound together by bonds other than lineage. Insofar as affines are an important part of any band, and affinal relationships as important in most respects as lineal relationships, the band cannot even be defined as cognatic or bilateral without qualification stressing its ad-hoc nature.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

621 falls unhappily apart however, and it looks indeed as if the Mbuti are
*197 in the process of adopting villager institutions wholesale, without adopting the system that would relate them.

[881] Further evidence in favor of this interesting half-truth of Mbuti dependence is plainly discernible in the adoption by the Mbuti of village ceremonials connected with *rites de passage*, in which they subject themselves completely to villager ritual authority. But again these adopted institutions seem to have little structural relationship to the Mbuti hunting life, divorced as it is from the village context. Once one grants that divorce, then one is left with an apparent vacuum, a lack of internal system that is almost anarchical. Yet there is no anarchy; law and order exist without the villager context as within, and without as in their villager institutions. In default of any clear exposition of internal system, however, it has been assumed by many that the actual situation is one of total Mbuti dependence upon the villagers.

222 The economy of the Mbuti is hunting and gathering, and they are
224 perfectly capable of independent subsistence. Hunger, in absence of village food supplies, is due only to laziness. The alleged economic
224 dependence of the Mbuti will be discussed in the next chapter. Here
476 it is only necessary to stress the possibility of their actual indepen-
* [177] dence of the village, and point to a dependence upon each other, best seen in the fact that all the hunting techniques involve some measure of co-operation between men, women and children. The net-hunt demands the greatest measure of co-operation; the little I was able to discover about spear-hunts indicates a preference for hunting parties of five or six men; and while archers can hunt successfully in threes, there are among the archers annual beat-hunts (*begbe*) which demand the same high degree of co-operation demanded by the net-hunt, involving the entire band. Some elementary principles of unity can be discerned, then, in these various hunting techniques, but they are not sufficient to fill the gap left by the absence of developed kinship or political systems.

621 In the hunting band, as we have seen, the population is somewhat mercurial and composite. Only when the band fragments into smaller units do we occasionally get a fragment that has some appearance of being a kin group. System still eludes us. Nor do the *sultani* and *capita*
• [622] offer any effective replacement for the missing political system. No one individual is effectively a leader; issues are settled by common

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

time of the cotton harvest. On the other hand, Chief Nakubai, another Lesé Chief to the north, always seemed to have Mbuti at his beck and call, though he maintained them in rather distant plantations, not close to his village, and as far as I know used them only to provide supplies of forest products, and to help guard the plantations.

The lesser chiefs and village headmen, with no police force at their disposal and with less wealth to use in bribes, were rather more successful because the relationship was more intimate and personal. It is not infrequent for a strong attachment to grow between the villagers and Mbuti, and in such cases the economic exchange is much more balanced. In all other cases there can be no doubt that the Mbuti, with less necessity on their side, have all the advantages while the villagers are the losers. It is significant that on the one hand the Mbuti delight in deliberately shortchanging their exchange partners, thus in their eyes proving their own superiority, while on the other hand the villagers are forced by lack of political control to accept such short change with relative passivity, and indeed find ways of rationalizing it. They do this either by referring to the Mbuti as *nyama*, or animals, thus excluding them from the realm of normal, moral human behavior, or else they openly admit the Mbuti are right to help themselves to plantation products.

This latter admission is one of respect for the anteriority of the Mbuti in the forest and is common throughout the Ituri, and beyond, though by no means always open. It is manifest in certain rituals, such as when villagers offer firstfruits from a new plantation to "their" Mbuti (effectively, any Mbuti that happen to be on hand at the time), or when Mbuti are offered places of honor during funerary ceremonies for important villagers. An exceptional example of this respect occurs among the Tembo/Rega populations of the Kivu district (Map 4), one instance of which occurred in September of 1958 at Mayolo village, where a new chief, Butahiri, was inaugurated. I did not witness the occasion, but he told me that on the day that he was crowned with the traditional bead hat, he had to sleep with his sister ("same stomach"). The next night he had to sleep with an Mbuti girl presented to him by the Mbuti "Chief." Butahiri insisted that there was such a Chief, and said that traditionally the girl was meant to be his daughter, but this was not always possible and in that case it was "some other" unmarried female relative. He said he only had to sleep with her once, after which she was sent

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

back to the forest and was never again to be allowed to see him or any of his family, but would be well cared for.

On attempting to find this Mbuti Chief, I discovered that he was in fact just an elderly hunter, and that the girl was his granddaughter. The local Mbuti denied any system of chieftainship, but said that they always appointed one person to deal with the villagers, as in this instance. Both they and the villagers claimed that the legitimate heirs to the chieftainship had to be born of either one of these two formal unions, and that in fact the Chief would sleep again with one or the other girl until she bore him at least two boys. They also said that obviously he would not sleep again with his sister (he himself seemed somewhat disgusted at the recollection of his first night as Chief), and so it would be his Mbuti wife who would provide the tribe with its heir.

There are also firstfruit offerings to the Mbuti in this area, and the same elements of respect and of economic unbalance extend right out of the forest into Ruanda and Burundi, even to the Twa in their relationship with the Tussi. For our present purposes, however, the two situations are not strictly comparable.

But however the villagers might rationalize the economic advantages that accrue to the Mbuti, they do not accept the situation entirely passively. They attempt to create some mechanism by which they can exert authority over the Mbuti and compel them to their service. It is quite evident that if the powerful tribal chiefs backed by armed police are unable to pursue the Mbuti in the forest (even the Belgian administration did not attempt to extend their authority this far), the lesser chiefs are going to be that much more incapable of asserting direct political control. Chiefs such as Kachui, Hamadi, Lupao and Nakubai did not even enter disputes concerning Mbuti in their tribunal records, preferring to deal with such cases "directly." I have witnessed a number of such cases, most of them involving alleged theft, or failure to reciprocate in the exchange of food. The Mbuti claim is invariably that the land is his (even when the charge is for theft of property, not of food), and the villager claim is, equally invariably, that the Mbuti are servants of the villagers, bound to them by indissoluble bonds of heredity and by the fact that the villagers "rescued" the Mbuti from the forest. To this the Mbuti may reply that they "dug" the villagers from a hole in the ground and taught them "how to see and smell and hear and talk." If the case involves food, each side claims original ownership of the plantain

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

[p.44]

CHAPTER 4

The Notion of Hereditary Ownership

P C 121 648 A superficial glimpse of the Mbuti/Villager relationship in any village might well tend to confirm the belief that the Mbuti are dependent upon the villagers for the very principles of their social organization. This is the claim of the villagers, the more sophisticated C [186] of which use a popular description of the Mbuti as *"les gens sans culture."* The Mbuti themselves will readily admit it, and investigation will, up to a point, confirm it. But we have already witnessed one contradiction; namely, that if the situation is one of superordination, and one of total cultural dependence of the Mbuti upon the villagers, then the villagers would have and be able to exercise some form of political control, and they do not. Indeed there are only the most tenuous political mechanisms for relating the two groups, such as the supposition that each hunting band has a headman or chief (entitled *capita* or *sultani*) who is answerable to the village headman. The villagers accord the Mbuti headman due respect, not far C 648 different from the respect they would accord a junior headman of another village, and hold him responsible for the behavior of his P 648 band. But even supposing that the Mbuti headman had any actual • 622 authority over his band, we have seen that the villagers are incapable of enforcing their will by taking either retributive or restitutive action against the band or the *capita* for fear of reprisal, and because of their very real need for the continued, if minimal, service of the Mbuti and their fear of losing even that.

P The Mbuti *capita*, in any case, is merely a village creation and car- # 117 ries no authority whatsoever and little influence among members of 622 the hunting band. The other Mbuti accord him his title when in the 554 village, or even when in the forest, if discussing a village problem. They use him as a convenient link who can also serve as a scapegoat. Through their "chief" the other Mbuti are freed of many of the cares and considerations involved in their relationship with the village, but

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

the position is by no means always popular, and there are instances of dispute as to who should fill a vacant position as *capita*. Usually it is an Mbuti who has a highly developed taste for village foods, tobacco, wine and hemp. Most frequently he fills a dual role, also being the hunting band's clown, an important figure in the settling of internal disputes, again essentially a scapegoat. He will convey to the hunting band the wishes of the villagers, and discuss with the band the questions of food exchange or supply of labor. Among the net-hunters this is about as far as he will go, any decisions after that being taken by group discussion. Among the archers, however, the *capita* may go further, translating the villagers' demands into more practical terms, and suggesting how the band can best effect a compromise. He may even allocate specific tasks to specific individuals or families, but if he is heeded it is with notably bad grace, and again only because those concerned deem it expedient. The Mbuti headman has absolutely no authority in the band, even in its village context.

The greater importance of the *capita* among the archers is related to the fact that, unlike the net-hunters, the archer bands are for the most part of the year fragmented into smaller sections, each virtually independent of the other. There is, then, a greater need to co-ordinate their response to village demands, as the villagers take advantage of the fragmentation by attempting to exploit each section simultaneously. Among the net-hunters, whose bands are much more closely knit, and hunt throughout most of the year as large co-operative units, the only function the *capita* serves, from the point of view of the band, is as an intermediary, little more than a message bearer. Certain *capita*, however, among both archers and net-hunters, acquire great renown among their fellow Mbuti by the success with which they cheat the villagers. This indeed is the only way in which the *capita*, as such, can acquire any prestige at all among his own people.

The major inconsistency of the system lies in the fact that it conflicts directly with a much more subtle means by which the villagers seek to gain control over the Mbuti. Being familiar only with tribal systems of a formal nature, whose organization rests upon the principle of patrilineal descent, the villagers can only conceive of Mbuti society in the same way. Not finding a chief or headman, they impose one, likening a hunting band to a village. They use him in much the same way they would use their own headmen. But the imposition of

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

this institution implies also the imposition of the principle of the patrilineal, patrilocal unit. Perhaps at one time it was; it now certainly is not.[1]

Finding political relations difficult to maintain and enforce, and although they still continue to attempt to deal with bands as one village would deal with another, through the *capita*, the villagers then look to interpersonal relationships as a means of acquiring their ends. They impose the village kinship system upon the Mbuti, keeping as accurate an account of the growth of an Mbuti family as they do of their own, and they ally the resultant Mbuti "clans" to village clans. It is easy enough to visualize the origins of the system, when hunting bands found they had to side with villages, the villagers mistaking (or perhaps correctly taking) the bands for unilineal-descent groups. In this way the relationship between the two groups would be hereditary and self-perpetuating. But the band today is not a unilineal-descent group, and may be comprised of a score or more lineages. Thus a village that is a kinship unit, recognizing the senior male-lineage representative as its headman, finds itself in relationship with a band under a *capita* who may only be remotely related to other male members of the band, by affinal or consanguineal ties. The band itself, consisting of different clans, evidently owes its allegiance, under the village system, to different villages.

On the one hand, the village claims to "own" the band, recognizing the *capita* as its representative. On the other hand, as a lineal unit the village claims a hereditary relationship with another lineal unit, and de facto dissociates itself, perhaps with the major portion of the band, and involves itself in politico-economic difficulties with the neighboring villages who may claim the other portions of that band.

The villagers claim to be saviors of the Mbuti, to have freed them from the necessity of living in the forest like animals, and they justify their claim to ownership in this way. If the Mbuti band were indeed a stable, localized patrilineal unit, then some effective basis for a relationship between the two groups along these lines might persist; but given the cognatic and fluid nature of the contemporary band, the notion of hereditary ownership seldom tallies with effective economic relationships. Consequently there are continuous disputes be-

[1] This is not to say that one could not find a band that, at one time of the year or another, is not in effect a patrilineage. It is, rather, to say that lineality would in such a case not be the essence of band structure, but incidental.

621 more related to the demands of economic co-operation than to any [224] other factor. [184]

But however stable a camp may become after the initial fragmentation, that fragmentation is but an indication of the more systematic processes of fission or fusion that come into play each time a camp moves. Plan 11[1] gives the layouts of each camp built by the Epulu band for a period of over a year, and the cyclic process is quite clear. For the net-hunters a large camp is normally advantageous, although beyond a certain point a net-hunt becomes unwieldy. But once a [621] year comes the honey season, when hunting is of secondary impor- [622] tance, and it is more advantageous for the band to be split into two or more sub-camps, thus tapping the territory's honey resources more effectively.

361 The series of camp plans shown indicates how the process of frag- 621 mentation as observed at work within *apa* Lelo is continued and 578 sharpened with the building of each new camp. Sites are even chosen because they afford greater privacy between the various sections, thus minimizing any serious disputes that are in progress. Some interpersonal hostilities will persist, however, and it is these and not lineal relationships that are reflected in the final fission, when the camp divides into a number of independent camps, or sub-bands, each going its own way. If the dispute is serious, one or another sub-band may go off to another territory, and seek to join up with that band. This was in fact Cephu's situation. During the honey season he left the Epulu territory and went back to his home territory to claim his honey trees. But that territory was occupied by a large band where Cephu's hunting chances were no greater than those of anyone else, and this was not to Cephu's liking. Cephu tried to carve out a territory for himself, between his own band and the Epulu band, but he was always being forced by sheer economics to join the one or the other. He could never induce enough men to camp with him to set up an [224] effective independent net-hunt. For this a minimum of seven is generally required, and Cephu could seldom raise above six.

So the monthly change of camp is an opportunity not only for a diplomatic rearrangement of the layout, minimizing latent hostilities, but it is also an opportunity for improving the economic strength of the band by either adding to it or subtracting from it.

The honey season itself is a last opportunity for old hostilities to [221] fade away, and the complete separation of the sub-bands into camps many miles apart generally resolves most sources of friction. If dis-

[1] [see pages 392 A-D -- Analyst]

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

[R 108-B]

E
622
344
352
291
516

2. The village headman's *baraza*, used for receiving visitors and holding public discussions.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

no further, except to point again to the obvious potential relationship between hunting technology and village exchange, the net-hunters being more easily able to acquire an excess of meat than the archers. However, it is difficult to ascertain just how far this relationship is effectual, for even the net-hunters maintain minimal exchange with the villagers, and only on the same nonformalized individual basis. There is rather more likelihood among the archers for there to exist a *capita* or *sultani* who will convey to his fellow-Mbuti the wishes of the villagers although he has no authority to take any other action, and this may be seen as being due, in part at least, to the less productive technology of the archers, and in part to the greater prevalence of fragmentation into small sub-bands.

DIVISION OF LABOR

There is little to say about the division of labor in Mbuti society, but most important is the fact that there is no religious belief or ritual practice that relates any activity to any one sex, nor is there any consecration of those everyday tasks that normally fall into the jurisdiction of one sex or the other. This, of course, is what might be expected from the personal terminology, which differentiates the sexes clearly only at the parental level. Basically men hunt and make hunting equipment, and organize the *molimo* festivals. The women gather vegetable foods and other forest produce, build the huts, prepare and cook the food; they organize the *elima* festival. Men make bark cloth, women make baskets. Children take part in all the economic activities. But women help make the nets, and they invariably make the twine from which the nets are made. Among the net-hunters the women, girls and young children act as beaters and are thus an integral part of the hunt, as they are among the archers in the archer *begbe* hunt. Men of both archer and net-hunter bands have no hesitation in gathering mushrooms and other vegetable foods when they have the opportunity. In both groups it is primarily and almost exclusively the men who gather the honey, for women seldom climb trees.

Women take part in the *molimo* and, although it is a small part, it is a highly significant one. The *elima*, though organized by the women and stemming from the maturation of a girl, is of equal importance to the male youths who play a vital role in the festival. All in all, sex does not seem to be of any particular significance in determining the structure of Mbuti economic activity. Of far greater significance is age,

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[P.181]

CHAPTER 11

Government: Internal

INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Before attempting to understand the over-all system of government in Mbuti society, it is necessary to distinguish between different fields of authority, for each field of activity has its own leaders, drawn from a particular segment of the community. It is in this way that authority is dispersed throughout the band; every adult is accorded special respect in one field or another, but none can claim respect in all fields. Individual authority is unthinkable, and not only are there no chiefs or headmen in Mbuti society; there are not even any councils of elders or any ritual specialists such as prophets or diviners. Such adults as have respect in any particular field at any particular moment do not even have any authority; they can merely claim to be heard. Their decision is likely to be given general assent and, as in economic matters, that decision is then said to be "good," and "pleasing" to the forest. The forest personified as a benevolent divinity remains as the only recognized authority, one which sometimes expresses its feelings with unmistakable clarity; an excessive storm, falling trees, poor hunting and ill health may all be taken as signs of displeasure, while good weather and good health and good hunting are indications that all is well. But often the forest remains silent. Then the Mbuti have to sound its feelings out through discussion. Dreams may be taken into account, but there is no question of waiting for visible signs of the forest's pleasure. The delegation of authority is clear; the decision of the whole band, the very fact of unanimity, is sufficient sign of the favor of the forest. There is always diversity of opinion, freely expressed, but prolonged disagreement is considered as "noise," and offensive to the forest. Unanimity, therefore, is a powerful and positive value, equated with the opposite to noise—quiet, or *ekimi*.

2: Turnbull E-8 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo - Kinshasa FO1

1. Band/Village: *capita*/Chief
2. Lineage/Lineage: Lineage elder/*Kpara*
3. Individual/Individual: *Karé*/*Karé*

We shall deal with each in turn to determine the formal nature of the relationship, and the degree to which it is effective.

Capita/*Chief*

The relationship of the band as a whole to the village as a whole would be a simple and effective one if the band were, as the villagers claim it should be, a unilineal entity based on the principle of patrilineal descent. However, as we have seen, the band is generally composite, and in any case its composition is constantly changing. Sheer territorial propinquity, however, encourages a relationship of economic exchange between these two units, regardless of the composition of either. Generally speaking there is no need for the village to relate to the band as a whole, food exchange being more easily effected at an interfamilial or interpersonal level. However, under the foreign economic pressures mentioned earlier, at certain times villages found it necessary to have the massed help of all the Mbuti they could muster. In such a case the village Chief summoned the Mbuti *capita* and made his wishes known. The *capita* relayed these wishes to the band, which then did whatever it thought expedient, after general discussion.

The *capita* seems to assume more importance as an institution in the villages of the archer area, to the east of the Epulu. However, even there the villagers themselves admit that the institution is foreign to the Mbuti. I have not once heard it claimed otherwise, by Mbuti or villagers. Among the archers, as among the net-hunters, old men and women are accorded respect, but they have no authority and their area of influence is limited in accordance with their age, and does not include the village. Such elders, then, have no more say than any other Mbuti concerning village matters pertaining to the band as a whole. But village affairs do not fall within the province of any age group, and the *capita* finds himself having to deal separately with each family, if indeed he takes that much trouble at all. Sometimes he may do so if a villager accompanies him to the camp in the hopes of adding strength to the village argument. I have seen this happen among the archers as among the net-hunters, in each case with a direct plea for all Mbuti to go to the village to help with the cotton harvest.

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

Usually the *capita* first made a plea from midcamp, and was listened to silently, but without respect and without reply. He then went from family to family, and from each family, despite the presence of the villager, received an emphatic and final negative answer. If the villager is not present on such an occasion, either the *capita* will act the clown as he delivers his message, or both he and his message will be ridiculed by others; there is, if anything, a greater chance of his achieving something for the village under such circumstances.

Respect for age is not conveyed upon the *capita* when acting in that capacity. Not only is he ridiculed, but if he persists in his efforts on behalf of the village, even his juniors, family members or otherwise, will combine to "shut his teeth." In areas where the occasional wealthy tourist passes by, the Mbuti regard him as they regard villagers, as animals to be eaten, and the *capita* fills the same role, but generally with more success for the rewards are usually more immediate and satisfying to all concerned. In other respects the situation is parallel to that of the village.

The difficulty is no less, even if the Mbuti are already in the village. If the villagers try to exert pressure on them as a band through the *capita*/Chief relationship, this precipitates an immediate return to the forest because the men will not even discuss the matter in the village. Their return may just be for purposes of discussion, but it may also lead to the return of the entire band. The men seem to regard it primarily as their province, the village, in a sense, being a hunting area calling for skill and courage, rather than a gathering area, and they explain their action in these terms, allowing that their wives could come if they really had something to say.

The band/village relationship, then, is not to be considered as highly effective, though there are times when the Mbuti find it expedient to act in concert in this way.

Lineage Elders/Kpara

The relationship of an Mbuti lineage to a village lineage is a little more effective, for while a band cannot be recognized as a unilineal entity, there are within it divers lineal units. One or more of these may well occupy a hereditary relationship with a village lineage, the head of which would be the *kpara*. They have no name for the head of their lineage except "old man," the term by which the villagers also refer to him.

As stated earlier, this relationship may be exceptionally cordial,

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4 •
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for village luxuries. Bribery, indeed, may be said to be the only effective control the villagers have over the Mbuti. But it is short-lived and costly, and is on an individual or familial basis at the most. As far as internal relations are concerned, the band clearly exists as a territorial unit composed of a number of nuclear families cooperating in economic food quest. The Epulu band, and nearly all others studied, are characterized by a composite nature, negating the possibility of lineal authority. Any form of central authority is further negated by the constant changing of band composition. Leadership exists in respect to different fields at different age levels, and is nowhere centered in a single individual. Any attempt at the assumption of individual authority, or even of excessive influence, is sharply countered by ridicule or ostracism.

There is consequently no central leadership, in the form of an individual or even of a council, with which the centralized village leadership can deal in political terms. Nor is there any lineal leadership, let alone any stable lineal unit, with which village lineal units can relate, except in theory. The institution of *karé* brotherhood is primarily an individual relationship, and although its abuse can enlarge the relationship to a band/village level, there is again no mechanism of effective relationship at that level. Therefore the *karé* relationship, insofar as it is effective, only relates individuals.

Effective economic relationship of a stable nature can be seen to exist only between individuals or between families, determined by territorial considerations and by mutual satisfaction. The only control arises from these considerations, heightened by the Mbuti addiction to certain village foods. However, this fragments the band to such an extent that we can say the band simply ceases to exist, as such, in relationship to any village community. Neither the Chief nor the *capita* has the slightest authority or control over the band; flux renders a lineal interrelationship impossible, and we are left with no more than an agglomeration of person-to-person exchange relationships that may be economically effective but convey no political control to either side, the nuclear family being the largest effective unit, and frequently not even being that.

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

commercial village that was set up on the roadside, by the government, immediately after Pat's death. The main focus of the village was not, as in so many villages, in either special plantations or road work, but in the Station de Chasse. This, with its collection of live forest animals, became an attraction for wealthy tourists with time and money enough to make the trip from Stanleyville or Beni; hence the optimistic Belgian who built the motel directly opposite. A little farther up the road, away from the river, were the houses of several hundred workers. This village stretched right up to the entrance of Camp Putnam, and beyond was the Hotel de Bière and a line of a half-dozen or so stores. The majority of these villagers, as in Camp Putnam, were from distant districts and from many different tribes. But here they had nobody to hold them together, as Putnam had his workers; their disputes were settled arbitrarily, according to Belgian notions of right and wrong. It was a village filled with jealousies, deep-seated grievances and smoldering hatred.

A few kilometers to each side of the Epulu River were two traditional villages. To the west was Dar es Salaam. The name was brought from the coast by the slave-traders, and its inhabitants were all descendants of the almost universally disliked BaNgwana, who had sold their souls to the traders and helped them in the capture of slaves and the theft of ivory. The headman of Dar es Salaam was a friendly rogue, Musafili. About two kilometers away from Dar es Salaam was the camp of Musafili's Pygmies. Like every other Negro he referred to "his" Pygmies as though they were chattels. Although Dar es Salaam always offered the warmest hospitality, I never felt at ease there. The heritage of a bloody and treacherous past was only barely dormant, and the BaNgwana are suspected today, as they always have been, of practicing the most dreaded forms of witchcraft and sorcery.

A little farther to the other side of the Epulu was a very different village, and one much more typical of the traditional settlement in

this area. It was named Eboyo, and the villagers belonged to the BaBira tribe, predominant in the southern and central Ituri. Here there were two chiefs—the traditional chief, Sabani, and the government-appointed chief, Kapamba. Kapamba's job was to see that the right crops were planted, harvested, and marketed to the Belgian government, and that the taxes were collected and paid over. The Belgian policy was largely to let the people in this rather difficult and unprofitable part of the Congo live as they had always lived. The only stipulations were that they should live peacefully, and that in addition to their own small plantations they should cultivate more ground for crops which would both help to feed immigrant labor forces, such as the road gangs and the workers at Station de Chasse, and be of commercial value to the Belgians in the world market for such products as cotton, palm oil and groundnuts.

Kapamba was not a popular figure. He was small and pathetically ugly. His hut was at the very far end of the village, behind a large hillock on the top of which stood his baraza. Only his close relatives and a few Pygmies lived near him.

In the village proper, Sabani's house was in the center. Sabani was a sly old man whose father had married a Lese girl, from the eastern edge of the forest. Sabani changed his tribal affiliation to suit the convenience of the moment, and the Belgians found it impossible to deal with him, so they appointed Kapamba in his place. But Sabani was still the real power in the village, and the real authority. He was also the chief ritual authority for miles around, and he was a frightening sight when painted and dressed for his role of witch doctor at the time of the nkumbi initiation ceremony. Even on other occasions when he wished to be formal—such as the visit of a Belgian administrator—he was no less inspiring. Ragged trousers came down to within a few inches of feet that were barely covered by ill-fitting shoes, slit where they pinched so as to be more comfortable. An old khaki tunic covered his bare chest, and on his head he wore

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either a pith helmet decorated with gennet skin, or else a long-haired wig of monkey fur. In his hand he carried a metal walking stick that had once been the handle and stem of an umbrella. Sometimes he wore the gennet skin around his waist, or tucked into his belt, or hung from his neck. It was the symbol of his ritual authority, and it contained the charms from which he derived his power. Generally Sabani was a kindly and gentle man, wise and good. But his loyalties were narrow, confined to his own kin and a few friends. Beyond that circle he was a man to be feared rather than trusted.

Eboyo also had its Pygmy village, not far from the main village, but Sabani preferred to keep his Pygmies in the forest where the administration could not see what they were doing. Generally they were tending illicit plantations, of hemp among other things. Sabani also had his own still, where he used to have a powerful spirit made from manioc. He was frequently drunk but never incapable. At all times he was an imposing and commanding figure. In his village there were some thirty families, including Kapamba's. Camp Putnam and Dar es Salaam were about half that size.

The attitude of all these villagers to the forest was the same. They made their villages as open as possible, and they built their houses without any windows. They tried to ignore the world around them, because for them the forest was hostile, something to be feared and fought. Even after cutting it down there was the constant labor required to keep it from growing back. *It* was filled with evil spirits that cursed the soil so that although it would bear gigantic mahogany trees it would produce only the most meager fruits for the villagers.

The tribes of this area had once been plains dwellers, with herds of cattle, living in the friendly open spaces of East Africa. When they were driven into the forest by more powerful tribes, they brought as much of their plains culture with them as they could. But their cattle died off, and they had to live by cultivation alone. They